

Dyslexia: Information for Teachers

Children,
Parents &
Teachers

Throughout their career, all mainstream teachers will have children with dyslexia in their class. They are the pupils who, from the beginning, struggle with reading, writing and/or spelling and possibly numeracy. However, they may be creative, articulate, imaginative or perform well in practical subjects. These children need to be identified, supported and closely monitored as early as possible to help them to succeed.

General indicators of dyslexia

- Might appear to be 'bright' in some areas but have a 'block' in others.
- Poor letter-sound recognition, awareness of sight vocabulary and sequential ordering.
- Poor short-term working memory – difficulty following instructions, forgets to do things.
- Slow at information-processing – spoken and/or written language.
- Might have a limited concentration span.

Reading and writing

- Poor standard of written work in comparison with oral language skills.
- Incorrect or confused sentence structure.
- Planning difficulties; 'muddled' sequencing of ideas/events; confusion with tenses.
- Incomplete, 'messy' or disorganised presentation of written work.
- Poor letter formation and spacing; difficulties with pencil grip and control.
- Frequent letter and number reversals (b/d; p/q/g; 2/5; 6/9).
- Limited or incorrect use of punctuation.
- Inconsistent spelling – spelling a word several ways in the same piece of writing.
- Difficulty remembering the spelling of common irregular words - 'said', 'they'.
- Confused order of letters in words for reading and spelling - gril/girl; word reversals - saw/was; on/no.
- Unusual or phonetic spelling which is not age-appropriate.
- Omits letters and/or syllables in words; misses out or adds words into sentences.
- Appears to dislike or avoid writing activities.
- Difficulty with blending letter-sounds to read words, and reluctance to read aloud.
- Problems with breaking words into syllables.
- Reads without expression in a slow, hesitant, manner with inaccuracies.



- Doesn't recognise familiar words – even when read earlier in the text or on the same page.
- Problems with copying information.
- Tendency to lose the place; problems with scanning text from left to right.
- Difficulty with comprehension and/or picking out the main points.
- May disregard, or rely on, context and/or picture cues to aid comprehension.

Numeracy and time

- Difficulty with sequential order, multiplication tables, days of the week.
- Confusion with mathematical symbols such as + and x signs.
- Difficulty understanding the concept of place value.
- Problems with reading/understanding the language of maths.
- Confused by positional language and directions – before/after; top/bottom; x/y axis.
- Problems with telling the time, time-management and/or concepts of time - yesterday, tomorrow.
- Difficulty with sequence and direction of procedures; copying or layout of written work.

Behaviour

- Appears to be disorganised and/or confused by everyday tasks.
- Uses avoidance tactics – looking for equipment, sharpening pencils.
- Performance/standard of work is inconsistent – has 'good days' and 'bad days'.
- Seems restless, easily distracted, inattentive and/or easily tired.
- Has little to show for a huge amount of effort; frustrated by lack of achievement.
- May adopt the role of 'class clown', be withdrawn, uncooperative or disruptive.

Remember that every child with dyslexia is different and has individual difficulties and strengths.

How teachers can help

- Although children with dyslexia will need additional targeted support, there are many ways that teachers can help in the mainstream classroom. Minor changes to day-to-day practice can make a huge difference towards effective learning.

Seating and grouping

- Check that each child can hear and see you, the board and visual prompts clearly.
- Seat the pupil where you can make eye contact and provide support quickly.
- Group pupils according to each activity, not by literacy level, unless specifically teaching literacy skills.

Information, instructions, organisation

- Give children thinking time to process information and respond appropriately.
- Make instructions short and simple. Break them down into small steps.
- Explain and present information many times in various ways (pictures, flow charts, diagrams).
- Ask pupils with dyslexia to repeat instructions so you can check their understanding.
- Display prompts and reminders about what to do, where to find things, useful words.
- Put labels on equipment and always keep them in the same place.
- Provide desk-top mats/jotter inserts – word banks, prompts and personal targets.
- Provide (and demonstrate how to use) practical aids such as calculators, number/tables squares.

Memory

- Use multi-sensory approaches to ensure that information is absorbed and stored.
- Teach a range of strategies to help children learn letter sounds and spelling rules.
- Many children with dyslexia are kinaesthetic learners – they learn by doing. Engage them in purposeful movement, using rhythm and visual activities to stimulate memory and trigger recall.

Written work

- Encourage alternatives to writing – drawing, dictating/recording answers.
- Check children's learning by requesting non-written responses – draw, act out, sing, dictate answers.
- Limit writing demands and give plenty of time to complete written work.
- Ensure that keyboard skills are taught – encourage the use of a computer.
- Provide planning formats/writing frames/story skeletons for extended writing.
- Teach children how to use mind maps, spider webs, bullet points, flow charts, ICT.

Marking

- Develop a code with your pupils for marking errors. Using a cross or red pen to highlight errors may not be the best way – lightly underline or use a dot.
- Try to explain errors made by marking their work with the pupil present.
- Specify what will be marked – content, spelling, technical skills or presentation – and mark only that.
- Minimise the number of errors you highlight – perhaps only one of each type. Suggest how to avoid these in the future.
- Use directed praise – say what you are praising – include effort as well as attainment.
- Avoid negative feedback in front of the class; give individual feedback privately.



Reading

- Provide tinted filters/overlays or reading markers.
- Use non-white paper and ask individual preferences for test papers.
- Match reading resources to reading ability, ensuring that it is age appropriate.
- Encourage the use of books in audio/digital format to support access to texts.
- Teach the use of keywords, highlighting, colours and images to help remember information.
- Highlight the main points in text to support comprehension, prediction and recall.
- Teach key vocabulary for new topics – use flash cards, word mats, posters/word walls.
- Ensure that the child is comfortable reading aloud – unless planned/prepared in advance.
- Introduce paired/shared reading activities to improve fluency, aid understanding and build confidence.

Board work

- Limit the amount of reading/copying from the board. Give copies of notes/examples.
- Use coloured markers for board work.
- Set the Smart board background on a colour – beige, blue.
- Shade white boards to eliminate glare/reflections.
- Write different items in different colours.
- Number or mark the start and end of each line/topic clearly.

More in-depth information to help in the classroom

- Addressing Dyslexia Toolkit – www.addressingdyslexia.org
- Dyslexia: A Practitioner's Handbook (4th Edition) by Dr. Gavin Reid
- Maths for the Dyslexic: A practical guide by Anne Henderson
- Dyslexia Pocketbooks (Teachers Pocketbooks) by Julie Bennett & Phil Hailstone
- Supporting Students with Dyslexia in Secondary Schools by Moira Thomson
- The Teaching Assistant's Guide to Dyslexia by Gavin Reid & Shannon Green
- 100 Ideas for Primary/Secondary Teachers for Supporting Children with Dyslexia by Gavin Reid & Shannon Green
- The Little Book of Dyslexia by Joe Beech
- Dyslexia Scotland Helpline 0344 800 8484 or helpline@dyslexiascotland.org.uk



Dyslexia Scotland

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